DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 320 910 SP 032 496

AUTHOR Nesselrodt, Pamela S.
TITLE Patterns in Teacher Decisions for Different Ability Classes.
PUB DATE Apr 90
NOTE 38p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Boston, MA, April 17-20, 1990).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Ability; *Attribution Theory; Classroom Research; *Classroom Techniques; *Decision Making; Secondary Education; *Student Characteristics; Student Evaluation; Teacher Attitudes; *Teacher Expectations of Students; Teaching Methods

ABSTRACT

Current research on teacher decision making reveals that ability is viewed as an important attribute in determining students' achievement and that teachers behave differently toward students of different ability levels. This study focuses on a secondary English teacher's decision making in a class she perceived to be of low ability and in one she perceived to be of high ability. Data were gathered through interviewing the teacher, audiotaping her thinking aloud while planning, videotaping class sessions with subsequent stimulated recall sessions, observations, and pertinent written documents. The results of this study do not show major patterns of differences in this teacher's decisions for the two classes, perhaps because the curriculum is the same for all classes. The noteworthy differences hinge on her style and the students themselves. For example, generally she made her plans for the general class, modifying them for the advanced class. The study provides insight into how a teacher translates curriculum into instruction, how instruction is modified to accommodate students' needs, and how fine-tuning takes place during the implementation of lesson plans. Thus, the study links the research on teacher decision making with attribution theory and the resulting expectancy literature. (JD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED320910

Patterns in Teacher Decisions for Different Ability Classes

Pamela S. Nesselrodt
Department of Curriculum and Instruction
College of Education and Allied Professions
The University of North Carolina at Charlotte
Charlotte, NC 28223

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

P. S. Nesselrodt

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Presented at the 1990 annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Boston, MA.

SP 032 496

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Patterns in Teacher Decisions for Different Ability Classes

The current research on teacher decision making reveals that teachers consider the characteristics of their students as they make instructional decisions (McCutcheon, 1980; Morine & Vallance, 1975; Yinger, 1980). Ability level is cited as a specific learner characteristic to which teachers attend during both planning and instruction (McNair, 1978-79; Mintz, 1979; Sardo, 1986). Additionally, the literature on teacher attributions for students' successes and failures along with the ensuing expectancy research reveals that ability is viewed by teachers as an important attribute in determining students' successes/failures and that teachers behave differently toward students of different ability levels (Clark & Peterson, 1986; Englert & Semmel, 1983; Haskins, Walden, & Ramey, 1983). It stands to reason, then, that there may be patterns of differences in the decisions that mediate between this student characteristic and subsequent teacher behaviors. Clark and Peterson (1986, p. 285) point out that no research has been done to show the thought processes that mediate between teachers' theories and beliefs and subsequent teacher behaviors.

This study links the research on teacher decision making with attribution theory and the resulting expectancy literature. It does this by focusing on a single teacher's

decision making within the contexts of a class she perceived as being low ability and one she perceived as being high ability. Furthermore, it broadens and deepens the current research base on teacher decision making by looking at the entire spectrum of teacher decision making from planning, to interactive decision making, to reflective decision making within these two specific contexts. Finally, it looks at the decision making of a secondary teacher where there is a dearth of decision-making literature (Clark & Peterson, 1986).

Objectives

The study explored whether a secondary English teacher's planning and interactive decisions for a class she perceived as being low-ability students differed from those made for a class she perceived as being high-ability students. The study had three objectives: (1) to describe how the teacher in the study derived her perceptions of the ability levels of the classes, (2) to determine whether patterns of differences existed in the teacher's planning for the two classes, and (3) to discern whether there were patterns of decisions this teacher made while interacting with classes of perceived different ability levels.

Data Source

The teacher whose decision making was studied was a secondary female English teacher in her mid-thirties who had taught for ten years. She held both a bachelor's degree and

a master's degree. This teacher was chosen from the pool of clinical instructors who were part of a large eastern university's teacher education program. These clinical instructors were classroom teachers selected and trained to work with pre-service teachers during their student teaching experiences. They were selected through a process that involved screening by both building and central office administrators/supervisors and by university faculty.

Studying one teacher who taught classes she perceived to be of both low- and high-ability levels precluded the possibility that any patterns of decision-making differences would be due simply to differences in teachers' planning styles. Keeping the variable of content relatively stable by studying the teacher as she taught not only the same area of language arts but also the same units to both ability levels insured that the results were not merely an artifact of differences in how a teacher approaches different language arts.

An English teacher was chosen primarily because of the likelihood that students would be grouped homogeneously by grade level in English classes thus enabling the researcher to look at a teacher's decisions for intact classes rather than for individual students. Brophy (1985) supports the notion of looking at intact classes even though previous expectancy research has focused on interactions with individual students because "...teachers' differential

expectations for individuals in the same class are but variations around the norms established by their expectations for the class as a whole" (pp. 310-311).

Methodology

Data were gathered through interviewing the teacher, audiotaping her thinking aloud while planning, videotaping class sessions with subsequent stimulated-recall sessions, observations, and pertinent written documents. The data gathering took place over a period of approximately six weeks during the spring months of the school year when routines were well established and the teacher had evaluated the strengths and weaknesses of her classes and made necessary instructional adjustments.

An initial interview, based on a predetermined protocol (see Appendix A), began to establish the context of the teacher's decision making by ascertaining her perceptions of the ability levels of her classes and her approach to teaching literature to each class. The interview was audiorecorded, transcribed, and content analyzed using categories that emerged from the data. The categories were Perceptions, How Formed, Approach, Expectations and Planning. Using these categories as the basis, the data were reduced into a narrative summary of the most salient points made by the teacher. Additional interviews pertaining to demographic data occurred during the study.

Following the initial interview, the teacher audiorecorded her unit, weekly, and daily planning for each class during two literature units. For this segment of the data gathering, the teacher was instructed to plan as naturally as possible but to be sure to include in her thinking aloud the planning elements of objectives, activities, content, materials, and evaluation. These could be addressed in any order most natural to the teacher.

The planning spanned a period of approximately six weeks. The first unit, on Romeo and Juliet, lasted 14 days. The teacher audiorecorded her unit planning. She also audiorecorded two weekly plans, the first and third, as well as one lesson plan per class for each of these weeks. The second unit, on Narrative Poetry, spanned 13 days. Again, the teacher audiorecorded her unit planning as well as her planning for the first week of the unit and one daily plan per class during that week.

As with the initial interview, the audiotapes were transcribed and content analyzed using categories that emerged from the data. The categories were Ends, Activities, Content, Materials, Evaluation, Process and Approach.

Because the units were the same for both classes, the differences in the teacher's planning for the two was much more apparent at the unit level where she specifically mentioned the differences than at the daily level.

Therefore, this data reduction focused primarily on the unit planning. The daily planning became a part of the analysis of the interactive decision making. The reduction of this segment of data also resulted in a narrative description of the most salient aspects of the teacher's planning process which included how she accommodated the needs of each class.

The implementation of the three lesson plans, mentioned above, for each ability-level class was observed and videotaped. These lessons were spaced approximately two weeks apart to help determine whether any patterns of differences that emerged from the planning and interactive decision making were consistent over time.

In addition to ethnographic notes taken during the implementation of the lessons, this study employed the stimulated-recall methodology used in the Morine and Vallance (1975) study. That is, each lesson was viewed as soon as possible in toto by the teacher and researcher. As the teacher signaled decision points, the researcher stopped the videotape. An audiorecorder ran throughout the stimulated-recall sessions. Additionally, the researcher stopped the videotape at two predetermined spots--the first change in activity and the second incorrect student response. When the videotape was stopped, the researcher asked the teacher the following questions:

a. What were you thinking at that point?
b. What did you notice that made you sort of stop and think? (If necessary, add: Was there

anything pupils were doing that made you sort of stop and think?)
c. What did you decide to do?
d. Was there anything else you thought of doing at that point, but decided against?
e. What was it? (p. 30)

Also, as was done in the Morine and Vallance study, the teacher was asked at the end of the recall session to choose two or three decisions that "were particularly important for the success of the lesson" (p. 50). Finally, the teacher was asked to explain how her postactive reflections on the lesson being examined would likely influence the succeeding day's plan.

As with the other segments of audiotapes, those recording the stimulated-recall sessions were transcribed and content analyzed using categories that emerged from the data (see Appendix B). Mean proportional frequencies for each broad category as well as each subcategory were tabulated to determine noteworthy patterns of differences in the cues precipitating decisions, the decisions themselves, and the types of alternatives considered during the decision-making process for the two classes. A difference between mean proportional frequencies was determined to be noteworthy if it was .10 or greater. A difference of .05 -.09 was determined to be a tendency.

Credibility of the Study

In addition to using several sources of data, the credibility of the study was established by using a peer

debriefer to "test working hypotheses" and methodological decisions, and to receive feedback from a disinterested party (Lincoln & Guba, p. 308). Member checks with the teacher were also used. The teacher read transcripts of all audiotapes, data reductions, and the final case report to verify and clarify them when necessary. Additionally, during the data analysis, the researcher verbally checked conclusions and interpretations with the teacher.

Results

Context of the Study

This teacher taught in a secondary school of about 1750 students in grades 9 - 12. The student population was a mixture from both professional backgrounds and agricultural backgrounds. The two classes for whom the teacher's decision making was studied were both ninth-grade English classes--one she perceived to be high-ability and one she perceived to be low-ability. The advanced-level class had 25 students in it, 21 of whom were female and 4 of whom were male. There was one black student in this class; the rest were white. The general-level class had 24 students in it with an even split of 12 males and 12 females. There were 6 black students and 18 white students.

Teacher's Perceptions of Classes

The teacher saw the two classes as being very different in their abilities. She saw the advanced class as being "bright," "confident" but unwilling to take risks, "verbal,"

possibly "stubborn," and lacking good work/study habits. They were also able readers and writers but "not the most willing workers." They were "motivated much more by grades than by learning." And, they were motivated by their accomplishments. These students were independent learners.

She saw the general class as being "one of the lowest general classes" she had ever taught. They were very dependent on the teacher and would not work outside of class. They had few successes but were "interested in succeeding" in the following grade level. They were frustrated because they felt that their efforts were not gaining them the successes warranted. These students were not motivated by grades. Nor were they readers by choice. The teacher saw them as just beginning to function as a group.

Basis for Perceptions

The teacher's perceptions were based primarily on her interactions with the students. At the beginning of the year, she began to assess their writing and to talk with them about the kinds of things they liked to read. Furthermore, she began the year with some perceptions based on her experiences with students she had taught in the past in both advanced-level classes and in general-level classes. She found, however, that she adjusted those perceptions each year to accommodate the group with whom she found herself.

The teacher also said that she continued to readjust throughout the school year. She used standardized test scores only to check on students whom she thought might hav been misplaced.

Influence of Perceptions

The teacher believed that her perceptions of her students' ability levels and the changes in those perceptions influenced her instruction. She saw them as affecting the content she chose, especially in the general-level class. They affected her instructional techniques and her methods of test administration and evaluation.

The teacher reported that her perceptions also affecte her attitude toward each class. She did more of what she called "nurturing-type teaching" in the general-level class She worked hard to build a rapport with them. She describe her relationship with the advanced-level class as "more academic."

The teacher conceded that she made more adjustments in her instruction for the general-level class than for the advanced-level class. This lack of adjustment was based on both her expectations of the advanced-level class and the tenth-grade teachers' expectations of what these students would have accomplished during the ninth grade. The general-level class affected the teacher's expectations of

them; whereas, the advanced-level class was expected to rise to meet her expectations.

Approach to Teaching Literature

This teacher did, however, see her overall approach to teaching literature to both classes as basically the same. Defining "approach" as "the tone, attitude, and all that I'd set up in a class," the teacher felt that students of all ability levels should find literature "both fun and meaningful." She did, though, say that both instructional and evaluative methods she used with each class were different. The amount of content covered was different; the depth of coverage of the content was different, and the independence in doing their work was different. The teacher said she tried much harder to get the general-level class to relate the literature to their own experiences than she did with the advanced-level class.

The teacher reported that she had developed her approach from her background, both her own teacher education and models she had as teachers. Within that general approach, she had developed the methodologies she used with classes of different ability levels from her own trials and assessments of the success of each method. Additionally, she mentioned reading professional journals, participation in workshops and classes, and a colleague as sources of ideas. The teacher felt that her methodology was successful with the advanced-level class and that she was making

adjustments that were making it more effective with the general-level class.

Teacher's Planning for the Classes

From the analysis of her unit planning of Romeo and Juliet, the teacher in this study seemed to focus on the piece of literature, or the broad content, as a given and to plan her objectives, materials, activities, and evaluation around that. And, even though she had more flexibility in choosing the poems taught, she used the same pieces for both classes because she felt that they were appropriate for both.

The teacher indicated that, "to a certain extent," the curriculum drove what she did in terms of content. She further explained:

> There are certain things which I must teach--certain pieces of literature....Even to the extent of what I can cut in the Odyssey, the curriculum says that the general-level students will have an idea of this and this in the course of the Odyssey, and that the [advanced-level students] will have to read it from cover to cover.

The school's English curriculum was basically the same for all ability levels. The objectives listed for all ninth grade students in English were the same. The ones pertaining to literature per se were:

> --The student will analyze the various literary elements in order to develop a fuller understanding and a deeper appreciation of works of literature.
> --The student will read major works in the classic, Judeo-Christian literary tradition in

order to appreciate its influence on later literature, art, music, and in present language.
--The student will make inferences from information in printed material.

The "major" pieces of "classic literature" specified for students in all ability-level classes were the same. They were Odyssey, Bible, Romeo and Juliet. There were variations within each piece as to the themes to be developed during the course of the instruction for each ability-level class. This left it to the discretion of individual teachers as to exactly how to achieve the stated objectives using these pieces of literature. Additionally, individual teachers decided which novel[s] and other pieces of literature their students would study. These, of course, supplemented the required pieces in achieving the stated objectives.

Based on this kind of curriculum, then, the teacher began her planning for each unit by deciding on an approach or a focus. During this study, she approached the Romeo and Juliet unit differently than in past years. She focused on the action of the play by using a hands-on approach entailing the use of "performance and rehearsal activities...sort of dramatic exercises to help them associate themselves with the speakers of Shakespeare's lines." This focus, then, became the underlying reason for her choice of activities used during the course of the unit.

Once the focus was established, the first step in the actual planning process was to list broadly what the general-level class would do during the course of the unit. The teacher decided to begin her planning with the general-level class because she wanted to do less than in previous years, and she thought that planning first for the general-level class would help her set narrower parameters for the unit. It would also enable her to determine what to add or modify for the advanced-level class.

Then, the teacher fleshed out the list of what she wanted to do during her preliminary scheduling--the second phase. The third phase of her unit planning for Romeo and Juliet was the development of a calendar which she shared with the students. The development of this calendar entailed yet another fleshing out of the activities and content (see Appendix C). The fourth phase of the teacher's planning for this unit entailed her modifying the general-level plan to meet the needs of the advanced class (see Appendix D).

The focus for the Narrative Poetry unit was "that narrative poetry can come through real, everyday experiences." During the course of her planning, the teacher continued to refine the focus of the unit which ultimately led her to deal in more depth with the characters' quality in each poem. Unlike the Romeo and Juliet unit, the teacher used the same plans for both

classes during this unit. She saw no reason to use different poems for the two classes because those chosen "would have an impact on any ninth grader." Her planning phases were the same as earlier described except the final phase, modifying the unit for the advanced-level class, was unnecessary.

The analysis of the teacher's unit planning yielded the following results. There were few differences in the planning done for each class. For the Romeo and Juliet unit, the teacher modified two unit objectives for the advanced class and deleted one. She also added content for the advanced-level class. They read "basically...the whole thing" while the general-level class read selected portions of the play. Additionally, the advanced class read selections about Elizabethan Theatre and about Shakespeare that the general-level class did not read.

The advanced-level class had more activities assigned them than did the general-level class. And, some of their writing assignments were different from the general-level class. For example, the advanced class kept a diary for one character during the course of the unit while the general class completed and turned in two shorter, separate entries. The additional content and activities for the advanced-level class were accommodated by giving them homework assignments.

For the Narrative Poetry unit, the teacher planned the same objectives, activities, content, and evaluation for

both classes and used the same materials. She felt, however, that the discussions in the two classes stemming from the same plans were qualitatively different because of the difference in their abilities. The teacher reported that the six-week test covering both units was the same for both classes except that the advanced-level class had an additional section on Great Expectations which they had read outside class. She also indicated that the test was composed of all objective questions.

Therefore, there were no real patterns of differences in the planning done for the two classes, and there were few differences in the planning overall. There were, however, subtle but important differences in the teacher's planning for the Romeo and Juliet unit in terms of the content covered, the activities, and some of the evaluation, especially that pertaining to the writing assignments. These differences in planning accommodated the differences in ability levels of the two classes.

Teacher's Interactive Decisions

The greatest pattern of difference in the interactive decisions was in the mean number of decisions made for each group. The mean number of interactive decisions made for the general-level class was 33 while it was 13 for the advanced-level class.

Table 1 shows the mean proportional frequencies of the broad types of interactive decisions the teacher made during

the implementation of the lessons observed. The greater proportion of Management decisions were made during the general-level class. The study also shows that there is a noteworthy difference (.10 or greater) in the mean proportion of Instructional decisions made for the two classes. The greater proportion of Instructional decisions were made for the advanced-level class. There was not a noteworthy difference in the mean proportion of Affective decisions made for the two classes.

TABLE 1 MEAN PROPORTIONAL FREQUENCIES OF TYPES OF DECISIONS

Decision/Ability Level	General M_n=33	Advanced M_n=13
*Management	.16	.03
*Instructional	.59	.76
Affective	.25	.22

*Noteworthy Difference

Table 2 shows a more discrete breakdown of the mean proportional frequencies of subcategories of interactive decisions made for the two classes. The only noteworthy pattern of difference was that the teacher made decisions to Minimize Point/Activity proportionally more frequently in the advanced-level class than in the general-level class. The results also show that the teacher tended to (Difference = .05 - .09) decide to Continue Plan/Return to Task proportionally more frequently in the advanced-level class than in the general-level class. She also tended to make

TABLE 2 MEAN PROPORTIONAL FREQUENCIES OF DECISIONS

Decision/Ability Level	General M_n=33	Advanced M_n=13
Management		
Ignore Behavior	.02	.00
Call on Student	.02	.00
Reprimand/Move/Threaten	.09	.03
Spell Out/Remind of Rules	.04	.00
Instructional		
Continue Plan/Return to Task	.16	.22
Change Order of Plan	.02	.00
Add Activity	.04	.05
Delete Activity	.05	.02
Elaborate Point/Activity	.17	.13
*Minimize Point/Activity	.03	.17
Elicit Student Involvement	.06	.07
Assess Understanding	.04	.00
Correct Student Mistake	.02	.09
Affective		
Taste for Classroom	.05	.00
Fun	.01	.03
Class Arrange./Environ.	.09	.11
Press Students to Work	.07	.00
Allow to Con't. Act.	.01	.05
Interrupt Students' Work	.00	.03

*Noteworthy Difference

decisions to Reprimand/Move/Threaten proportionally more frequently in the general-level class than in the advanced-level class. Additionally, the teacher tended to decide to Press Students to Work proportionally more frequently in the general-level class than in the advanced-level class.

Table 3 shows the mean proportional frequencies of Cues

TABLE 3 MEAN PROPORTIONAL FREQUENCIES OF CUES

Cue/Ability Level	General M_n=33	Advanced M_n=13
Plans	.08	.02
History with Students	.11	.08
*Student Action	.36	.23
Student Statement	.09	.08
Student Response	.33	.31
Interaction with Previous Class	.05	.05
Teacher Feelings	.13	.15
None	.01	.05
Text/Material	.00	.08
Time	.07	.07

*Noteworthy Difference

for each ability-level class. The only noteworthy pattern of difference is that the teacher considered a greater proportion of Student Action cues for the general-level class than for the advanced-level class. And, although the difference is not a noteworthy one, she tended to be cued by her Plans proportionally more frequently in the general-level class than in the advanced class. But, she tended to pay attention to Text/Material cues proportionally more frequently in the advanced-level class than in the general-level class.

Finally, Table 4 shows the mean proportional frequencies of Alternatives considered by the teacher while making intereactive decisions. The only noteworthy difference is in the mean proportional frequency for Modification of Decision. The teacher considered

TABLE 4 MEAN PROPORTIONAL FREQUENCIES OF ALTERNATIVES

Alternative/Ability Level	General M_n=33	Advanced M_n=13
None	.45	.43
Stay with Plan	.10	.08
*Modification of Decision	.14	.27
Opposite Action	.31	.22

* Noteworthy Difference

modifications proportionally more frequently during the advanced-level class than during the general-level class. Although the difference is not a noteworthy one, the teacher tended to consider the Opposite Action more frequently during the general-level class than during the advanced class.

Influence of Reflection on Next Lesson

The teacher indicated a greater number of immediate affects of each day's lesson on the next day's lesson in the general-level class. In two of the three general-level lessons, she indicated that she would need to add activities for the next day because of additions and deletions made during the observed lesson.

The teacher indicated that a decision made during only one of the advanced-level lessons would affect the next day's lesson. Because of the decision to add an activity she would have to modify the next day's plan to accommodate the time required for that activity. The teacher also indicated that the other two advanced-level classes observed

would influence future lessons in which she was using similar methods. The reasons that the other two lessons did not affect the succeeding day's lesson was that one was a "regrouping" day and the other had been scheduled for movies. Therefore, there is only a slight pattern of difference in how interactive decisions made for each ability-level class affected the next day's plans which could have been more a function of weekly planning than of the kinds of interactive decisions the teacher made.

Discussion

The results of this study do not show major patterns of differences in this teacher's decisions for the two classes of perceived different ability levels. They do, however, show that there are, indeed, both noteworthy and subtle differences in her thinking that mediated between the characteristic of student ability and her subsequent behaviors. There are probably three primary reasons for the similarities in the planning for the two classes and for those few patterns of differences that did occur in the interactive decision making for the two classes. These probable reasons are the curriculum document, the teacher's style, and the students themselves.

Planning

Although the teacher described her basic approach to teaching literature to all ability-level students as the same, she did consider the ability level of her classes

during her planning for them (Morine, 1976; Mintz, 1979; Sardo, 1986) and, to some extent, adjusted her plans to accommodate the differences. Additionally, the teacher felt that the curriculum was a driving force behind her content decisions. This, along with the fact that the curriculum objectives for both levels were the same, no doubt influenced the teacher's decisions and, therefore, attributed to the similarities in her planning.

And, even when she had more flexibility in her choice of poems, the teacher chose to use the same for both classes because she felt that they were appropriate for both. This indicates that the school's philosophy is that the curriculum should be basically the same for students of all abilities. Furthermore, it shows that, at least to some extent, the teacher's philosophy is congruent with that of the school.

Interactive Decisions

The noteworthy differences in the interactive decisions this teacher made for the two classes hinge not so much on the curriculum as on the teacher's style and the students themselves. This teacher's interactive decisions were more a fine-tuning (Joyce, 1978-79) of her original plans than a drastic change from them. It was noted above that this teacher planned her Romeo and Juliet unit by beginning with the plans for the general class and modifying them for the advanced class.

One viable explanation, then, for the great difference in the mean proportional frequency of interactive decisions made for the two classes (General = 33 and Advanced = 13) is that the teacher had already done some of the required fine-tuning during the planning phase for the advanced class when she was modifying the general class's plans to accommodate a higher ability level class, thus decreasing the mean proportional frequency of interactive decisions in the Advanced class. However, this is probably not the correct explanation for the great difference.

It seems more likely that the reasons for this difference rest on the differences in the teacher's perceptions of the classes, her attitude toward each group, and her subsequent expectations of each group. First, the difference was apparent even when the teacher used the same plans for the two classes during the Narrative Poetry unit (General = 30 and Advanced = 12.) Second, the teacher's interactive decisions were related primarily to unpredictable issues (MacKay & Marland, 1978). And, third, the greatest proportion of cues precipitating interactive decisions were those coming from the students themselves (Student Action and Student Response).

The teacher said that she was "much more willing to let the general kids drive what's going on in class...[by] starting where they are and trying to progress from there." Quite in contrast to this, she reported that she had "an expectation" for the advanced class which "they will

meet...or they're not gonna be in there any more." She described the class as "much more static" than the general-level class.

The teacher also reported that she "steeled" herself for the general-level class and was not able to "stand off from them" which likely helped her to establish and maintain the kind of awareness of the students, their behaviors, and their understanding of the concepts presented in the class necessary to do the "nurturing-type" teaching she described. This was also, no doubt, necessary in maintaining discipline in this class which was noticably livelier than the advanced class. The tenor of the class itself along with the teacher's attitude toward them, then, likely resulted not only in more Interactive decisions being made but in more Management decisions being made there as well. Likewise, the general-level class's lack of motivation would lead the teacher to tend to decide to Press Students to Work more frequently than she would need to do with the advanced-level class.

It appears that the teacher's greater proportional frequency in making Instructional decisions for the advanced-level class could also have been affected by both her and the students. Within that broad category of Instructional decisions, the teacher tended to decide to Minimize Point/Activity and to Continue Plan/Return to Task more frequently than to make other kinds of Instructional decisions. Some of this could have been due to a

combination of the teacher's expectations of these students in terms of what they would cover during the course and the probable tendency for high-ability students to be able to handle divergences from the plan so that greater depth can be achieved. However, in order to complete planned tasks, the teacher would need to Minimize Point/Activity or Continue Plan/Return to Task. Finally, the teacher tended to consider more different alternatives (Modification of Decision) for the advanced class than for the general class which could be a result of the greater range of possible options for that class.

Conclusions

While this study explores the decision making of only one secondary English teacher, it does provide insight into how a teacher translates curriculum into instruction, how instruction is modified to accommodate the needs of different ability-level students, and the fine-tuning of that takes place during the implemention of a teacher's plans. And, although the differences were few this teacher's decision making was certainly affected by her perceptions of the ability levels of her classes.

The study thus links the research on teacher decision making with attribution theory and the resulting expectancy literature. It also shows the decision making that mediates between a teacher's theories and beliefs about her classes and her subsequent behaviors. In showing these relationships, the study provides a springboard for further

research which should explore whether similar decision-making patterns are valid for secondary teachers in other subject areas as well, whether novice teachers exhibit similar decision-making patterns, and whether there is a progression in the development of decision-making skills related to the ability levels of their classes by teachers as they gain classroom experience.

Both the present study and those proposed above would provide both teacher educators and educational researchers with a description of how a teacher makes instructional decisions for classes of different ability levels. These could be used in teacher education as examples of decision-making strategies and of modifying instruction for students of all ability levels.

In addition, the methodology employed in the present study can provide instructional supervisors and researchers with a more contextually based perspective from which to evaluate and/or explore instruction. Curriculum developers, too, can use knowledge about the translation of curriculum to design programs from a more informed vantage point.

Finally, studies such as this provide teachers involved with the opportunity to explore and think about their own decision-making processes. Additionally, it enhances the role of practitioners in research by establishing a colleagial relationship between them and researchers. (Clark, 1988).

References

Brophy, J.E. (1985). Teacher-student interaction. In J.B. Dusek (Ed.), Teacher expectancies (pp. 303-328). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.

Clark, C.M. (1988). Asking the right questions about teacher preparation: Contributions of research on teacher thinking. Educational Researcher. 17, 5-12.

Clark, C.M. & Peterson, P.L. (1986). Teachers' thought processes. In M.C. Wittrock (Ed.), Handbook of research on teaching (pp. 255-296). New York: Macmillan Publishing Company.

Englert, C.S. & Semmel, M.I. (1983). Spontaneous teacher decision making in interactive instructional contexts. Journal of Educational Research, 77, 112-121.

Haskins, R., Walden, T., & Ramey, C.T. (1983). Teacher and student behavior in high- and low-ability groups. Journal of Educational Psychology, 75, 865-876.

Joyce, B.R. (1978-79). Toward a theory of information processing in teaching. Educational Research Quarterly, 3, 66-77.

Lincoln, Y.S. & Guba, E.G. (1985). Naturalistic inquiry. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.

MacKay, D.A. & Marland, P. (1978, March). Thought processes of teachers. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Toronto, Canada.

McCutcheon, G. (1980). How do elementary school teachers plan? The nature of planning and influences on it. The Elementary School Journal, 81, 4-23.

McNair, K. (1978-79). Capturing inflight decisions: Thoughts while teaching. Educational Research Quarterly, 3, 26-42.

Mintz, S.L. (1979, April). Teacher planning: A simulation study. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco.

Morine, G. (1976). Special study C: A study of teacher planning. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco.

Morine, G. & Vallance, E. (1975). Special study B: A study of teacher and pupil perceptions of classroom interaction (Tech. Rep. No. 75-11-6). San Francisco: Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development.

Sardo, D.L. (1986). Instructional decision making in middle schools: case studies of teacher planning. Dissertation Abstracts International, 47, 3375A. (University Microfilms No. 86-29, 288)

Yinger, R.J. (1980). A study of teacher planning. The Elementary School Journal, 80, 107-127.

Appendix A--Protocol for Preliminary Interview

I'd first like to ask you a few questions about your perceptions of the classes being studied.

1. Describe the classes being studied.

    a. What are their strengths? Their weaknesses?
    b. What would you say is the overall ability level of each class?
    c. Upon what kinds of information do you base your perception of the ability level of these classes?
    d. What are your sources of information?
    e. Do you use this information related to each class in making instructional decisions? If so, how?
    f. How does each class compare with those of similar ability levels from years prior to this?

2. Have your initial perceptions of each class's ability level changed since school began in the fall? If so, how? Have these changes affected your instructional decisions? If so, how?

Now, I'd like to ask you about your approach to teaching literature to each of these classes.

1. Describe how you approach teaching literature to low-ability classes? High-ability classes?

2. What are the bases for your approach(es)? How did you develop these?

3. What do you see as fundamental differences in these approaches?

4. What do you see as fundmental similarities?

5. Does your approach seem effective with each of these classes? What, if any, modifications of your usual approach have you made with these groups?

6. Is there a different curriculum document for each of these classes? How does that affect your planning and teaching?

Appendix B--Categories of Interactive Decisions

A. Categories of Cues

1. Plans--The teacher's preinstructional plans. What she had planned to do before the class began. A preconception of what she wants to do instructionally.
2. History with Students--The teacher bases a decision on what she knows about the students from prior experience with them.
3. Student Action--Student(s) does something to precipitate teacher decision. Can include chatter, laughter, attentiveness, on-task or off-task behavior, facial expressions.
4. Student Statement (magical moment)--Something a student(s) says that triggers a decision on the part of the teacher. (Magical moments are those student statements that act as transitions into points or activities that the teacher had planned.)
5. Student Response--Verbal response to teacher direction(s) or question(s) precipitates teacher decision. Can include general level of discussion, written response to question and magical moments.
6. Interaction with Previous Class--An interactive decision from a class period earlier than the current one results in a decision being made for the current one. (Falls somewhere between interactive decision and planning.)
7. Teacher Feelings--Teacher's feelings of discomfort either physical or emotional.
8. None--No apparent cues that the teacher could name.
9. Text/Material--Teacher notices something in the material that she had not noticed previously or notices papers she needs to deal with.
10. Time--Teacher thinks about time in class.

B. Categories of Decisions

1. Management--The way the teacher deals with students' behaving in ways not acceptable.

    a. Ignore Behavior--Teacher does nothing.
    b. Call on Student--Teacher asks student a question to stop unacceptable behavior.
    c. Reprimand/Move Student/Threaten (punitive behavior)--Teacher calls a student down for unacceptable behavior.
    d. Spell out Rules/Remind of Rules--Teacher tells rules of activity before they begin to prevent disruptive behavior or reminds them of existing rules.

2. Instructional--Ways that teacher handles issues directly related to the methods, materials, content, evaluation, and objectives of the lesson.

   a. Continue as Planned/Return to Task--Teacher does not change plan following a decision cue. Part of continuing as planned may include trying to find a student to answer a question.
   b. Change Order of Plan--Teacher covers same material but changes sequence from plan.
   c. Add Activity--Teacher adds unplanned activity. This can be precipitated by teacher or by a student whose interest is pursued by the teacher.
   d. Delete Activity--Teacher decides not to do something planned. This can include a full activity segment or simply taking up a homework assignment.
   e. Elaborate on Point/Activity--Teacher adds detail, explicates, and/or delves into the material or activity more than she had anticipated.
   f. Minimize Point/Activity--Teacher does not dwell on point or activity. She makes less of its importance or takes less time with it than anticipated.
   g. Elicit More Student Involvement--Teacher has students interact with material in way different from anticipated to get them more involved.
   h. Assess Understanding--Teacher evaluates to what extent students understand the material being covered.
   i. Correct Student Mistake--Teacher tells class correct answer when a student gives incorrect information.

3. Affective--The way a teacher handles an issue dealing with the classroom environment both physical and emotional.

   a. Taste for Classroom--Teacher's action or response based on what is acceptable in the classroom.
   b. Fun--Teacher assigns activities based on what the students might enjoy rather than on their being related to instructional objectives.
   c. Classroom/Class Arrangement/Environment--Teacher decides to modify the classroom or the arrangment of students or her own seating to insure an atmosphere condusive to learning.
   d. Press Students to Work--Teacher pushes reluctant students to work or off-task students to get on task.
   e. Allow Students to Continue Activity Past Intended Time--Teacher allows students to work on activity longer than anticipated.
   f. Interrupt Students' Work--Teacher decides to interrupt students while they work.

C. Categories of Alternatives Considered

1. None--Teacher considers no alternatives to her decision.
2. Stay With Original Plan--Teacher decides against a considered change from her plan.
3. Modifications of Decision--Teacher considers a more elaborate version of the final decision and/or a more restricted version.
4. Opposite Action--Teacher considers doing the exact opposite of what she ultimately decides to do.

Appendix C--Facsimile of: Calendar for General Class

Romeo and Juliet
March 17 - April 6, 1989

OBJECTIVES: Students will:

--recognize the major plot elements of Romeo and Juliet
--identify the author of the play, his native land, and several ways in which the English he uses is different from the English they speak
--apply situations in the play to: 1. their own experiences and 2. modern day situations
--identify characters and label the side of the "battle" to which each belongs
--complete a variety of writing assignments including: a sentence combining exercise, a diary entry for a character, a comparison/contrast paragraph, a personal narrative, and several writing to learn activities

DATE	CLASS	ASSIGNMENT
3/17	language differences between Shakespeare's English and ours?	Language Worksheet I
20	continue working with language differences; brainstorm what we know about R & J	Language Worksheet III
21	review h.w.; Prologue; summary	sentence combining worksheet
22	review h.w.; quiz; I, i (Prince's ultimatum & Romeo's "problem")	writing assignment
23	review h.w.; I, ii; iii & v (Juliet's situation; they meet)	sketch tableau of end of party
24	tableaus; writing assignment (diary entry)	
27	Act II, ii (balcony scene); translation activitiy	complete translation
28	read translation; potential problems?	writing assignment

29	review h.w.; Act III, i; v (BIG fight; honeymoon)	writing assignment
30	Act III, v (Juliet's problem); groups-- write script	script scene
31	act out III, v from translations	
3	Act IV, i, iii (the plan, acting on the plan); begin writing assignment	continue writing assignment
4	Act V, iii (the deaths; the results); debate	continue debate
5	relating the play to us and to the present day; writing assign	continue writing assign.; prep notebook
6	Field Trip; the movies, Romeo and Juliet and West Side Story; writing assignment; Notebook	

Appendix D--Facsimile of: Calendar for Advanced Class

Romeo and Juliet
March 17 - April 6, 1989

OBJECTIVES: Students will:

--recognize the major plot elements of Romeo and Juliet
--read background information on Shakespeare, the Elizabethan Theatre, and the language Shakespeare uses
--apply situations in the play to: 1. their own experiences and 2. modern day situations
--complete a variety of writing assignments including: a sentence combining exercise, two cinquains, a character diary, a comparison/ contrast paragraph, and several writing to learn activities

DATE	CLASS	ASSIGNMENT
3/17	language differences between Shakespeare's English and ours?	Language Worksheet I
20	continue working with language differences; brainstorm what we know about R & J; Prologue	Language Worksheet III; read article on Shakespeare's language & complete sent. combining ex.
21	review h.w.; summary; Act I, i	writing assign.
22	review h.w.; I, ii, iii iv, v	Queen Mab drawing; tableau sketch
23	introduce diary assign.; begin diary writing; tableaus	read Shakespeare background info. & write cinquain
24	groups -- cinquains; Act II	complete Act II & & worksheet; brainstorm Act II diary entry
27	writing groups -- diary drafts; Act II quiz; translation act.	final copy Act II diary; complete translation
28	read translations; Act III	draft Act III diary entry

29	prepare III rdg. out	read background of Elizabethan theatre; cinquain
30	groups -- cinquain;	Act IV; cloze worksheet
31	q & a Act IV; writing groups -- Act IV diaries; Act out Act III	draft diary entries
3	Act V	draft Act V diaries
4	writing groups -- Act V diaries; "Purgatory"	prep diaries for handing in
5	diary due; relating the play to us and to the present day; writing assign	continue writing assign.; prep notebooks
6	Field Trip; the movies, Romeo and Juliet and West Side Story; writing assignment; Notebook	